

# Curaçao and Aruba on Guard

BY W. ROBERT MOORE

*With Illustrations from Photographs by the Author*

ON CURAÇAO and Aruba, tiny Dutch islands off the Venezuelan coast, two of the world's largest refineries and one smaller one are producing oil and high-octane gasoline to keep Allied planes in the air, tanks rolling in battle, and ships plowing sea lanes with men and munitions.

It is revealing no military secret to speak of these huge island installations. They've been in operation for years. Millions of barrels of gasoline, Diesel oil, and other oils pour annually from their busy refining and cracking plants. Almost everyone on both islands is "in oil" in one way or another.

When the Germans sent their blitzkrieg crashing into the Netherlands in May, 1940, British and French troops were dispatched immediately to help the local garrisons on Curaçao and Aruba guard these fountainheads of precious fuel. After the sudden fall of France her troops were withdrawn.

The British remained until after United States forces came in February last year.

## First Enemy Shots in New World

Less than a week after the announcement by our State Department that United States contingents had been sent to Curaçao and Aruba, at the invitation of the Netherlands Government, Axis submarines bobbed up on the scene and fired their opening salvos in the Western Hemisphere.

Early in the morning of February 16, they launched torpedoes against several tankers and sent shells from deck guns hurtling over the big Lago refinery at Aruba.

Some tankers were damaged or set afire and sunk, but the shells all overshot their mark, except one which dented a Diesel oil tank and ricocheted harmlessly. Not a single part of the installations was damaged.

"True, the subs sank a few ships and gave us some fireworks for a while," said one official. "But, all in all, they missed the boat. They'll get some hot stuff thrown at them if they come back!"

Since that first foray, one submarine has returned. It fired a few ineffectual shells at some outlying storage tanks on Curaçao, then crash-dived and fled.

There was a reason. Curaçao and Aruba are on guard.

When I visited the islands, I saw American officers and men up to their sunburned necks

in work perfecting the defense of these vital refineries.

Men, guns, and machines are dispersed over cactus-studded outposts ready to give any invader a deadly reception (page 170).

So alert to possible enemy action were the lookouts that night after night alarms were turned in to headquarters on suspected flashes of tracer bullets. They proved to be only the trails of particularly bright falling stars.

With its homeland conquered by Germany and the Netherlands Indies overrun by the Japanese, there is precious little of the Netherlands Empire still free.

These islands, together with Surinam (Dutch Guiana) on the northern coast of South America, are about all that remain at this writing (map, page 172).

The island of Bonaire, a few miles east of Curaçao, and tiny Saba, St. Eustatius, and part of St. Martin in the Leeward Islands chain hemming the Caribbean, also are Dutch. However, they are of little commercial importance and have only a handful of people.

The main sources of wealth under Queen Wilhelmina's control are these refineries on Curaçao and Aruba and Surinam's rich bauxite deposits—an important source of our aluminum supply. But with these two strategic weapons her refugee government still fights.

Despite this emphasis on oil, Curaçao and Aruba themselves have not a single drop. Most of it comes from the Lake Maracaibo and other vast Venezuelan fields nearly 200 miles away.

## A Geological Bottleneck

A geological bottleneck in the ocean entrance to Lake Maracaibo allows the passage only of shallow-draft vessels.

To exploit the rich resources oil concerns needed deep-water facilities. Curaçao, possessing a wide, landlocked harbor, and Aruba, affording a deep anchorage behind a reef, thus have risen as the industrial refining middlemen to the Venezuelan deposits.

A constant procession of shallow-draft tankers shuttles back and forth between Maracaibo and the islands, bringing loads of crude oil. Here it is first refined and then loaded into big ocean-going tankers.

On a plane packed with persons traveling on wartime priorities, I flew from Miami to Maracaibo. So large is Lake Maracaibo that



### U. S. Troops Now Guard the Huge Refineries on Curaçao and Aruba

Carrying his gas mask and "tin hat," this young American is on duty at the Lago refinery on Aruba. Invited by the Netherlands Government, American forces arrived in the islands in February, 1941. Less than a week later, German submarines made a concerted attack on tankers and refineries, but did little damage (page 169).





Phillip Hanson Hiss

### Keen Eyes and Big Searchlights Peer Down on Interned Germans

The officer in charge of the internment camp on Bonaire and a native soldier stand in one of the guard towers to see that no one escapes. Germans who were in the Netherlands West Indies when the mother country was invaded were rounded up and brought here (page 185).

we could see none of the forests of oil derricks that stud stretches of its shores and reach far out into its waters.

This Maracaibo Lake Basin, as it is known to the oil industry, covers a water and land area of about 40,000 square miles, beneath which is one of the world's largest known deposits of crude petroleum. The hot tropic town of Maracaibo itself reflects little of the riches that lie in this fabulous region.

Transferring from the big Pan American flying boat to a land-based Lockheed of the K. L. M., or Dutch line, we flew to Aruba and Curaçao—and flew blind.

All windows in the passenger compartment were blocked by translucent covers as a military requirement. The authorities are taking no chances on letting anyone look down on the island defenses.

After being dropped down in the midst of a bustling military encampment, we were whisked away to little Holland! At least it seemed so to me as we rode into Willemstad, capital of Curaçao. If the Dutch had broken off a small chunk of the Netherlands, towed it out here, and anchored it in the blue Caribbean, the scene would be changed hardly a whit (Plates VI, VII).

Here are gaily tinted houses with fine old Dutch gables and doorways. Dutch names, difficult for us to pronounce, appear everywhere. The long, narrow harbor entrance and near-by slender lagoons add the illusion of canals. Lazy sailboats line the water front.

The likeness is hardly surprising. Curaçao has been under Dutch control almost continuously since 1634.

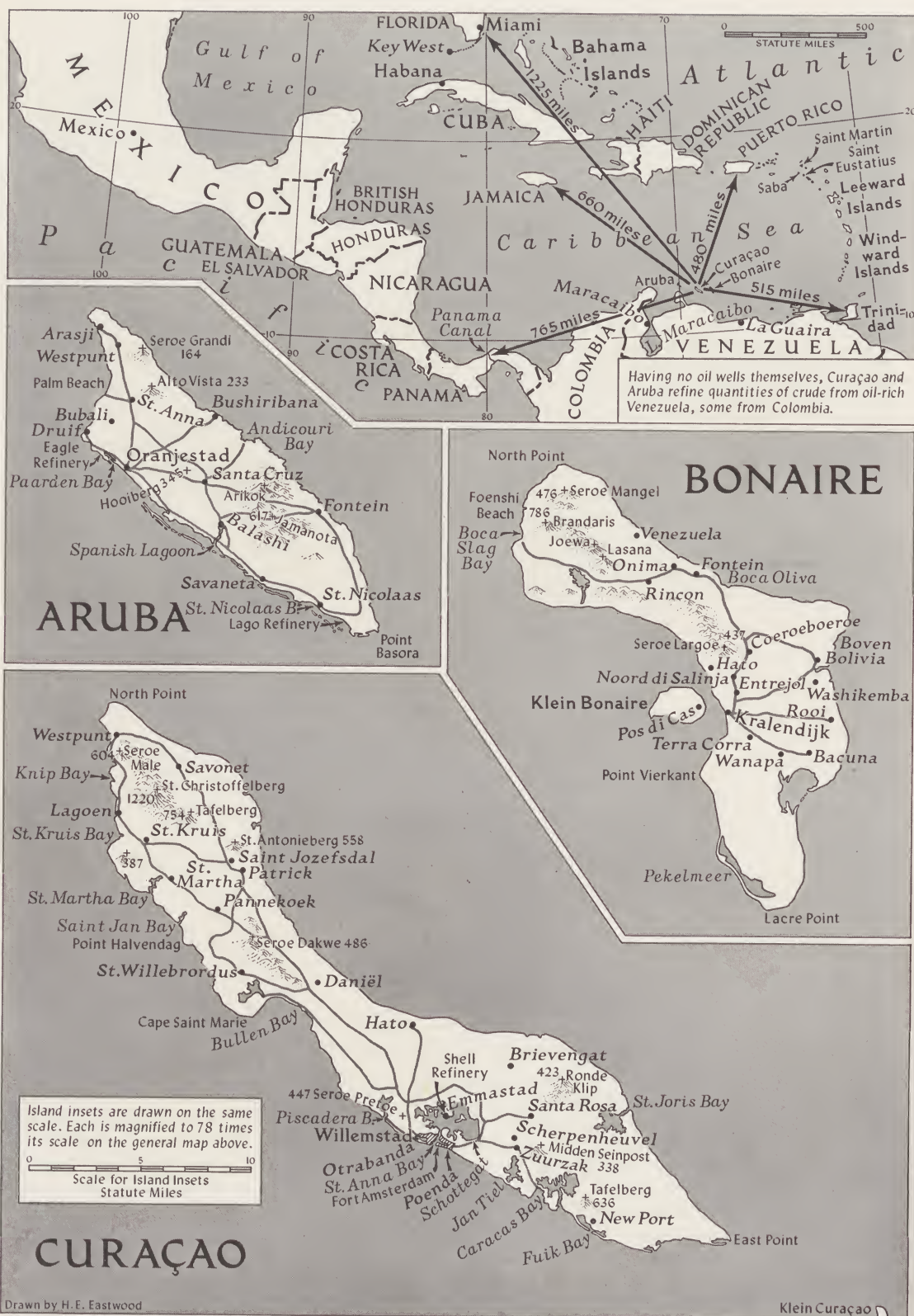
More surprising, perhaps, is one of its historical incidents.

When New York was still New Netherlands and was endangered by hostile Indians, the Governor of Curaçao sent troops to its relief. Two years later, 1646, this same governor was given the task of governing the young colony in addition to his duties of controlling Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire.

He was Peter Stuyvesant—he of the wooden leg and iron will.

Today, it seems but a fair turnabout that another former governor of New York, also of Dutch ancestry, should send troops down to guard Peter Stuyvesant's old domain.

Peter himself might be a little confused at the growth of New Netherlands to New York, that the streets of New Amsterdam through which he stumped on his wooden leg are now



From Huge Refineries on These Tiny Dutch Isles in the Caribbean Flows Oil for War





### Home Is a Tent in a Cactus Patch for These U. S. Soldiers on Curaçao

Off duty, one soldier shaves, while another writes a letter to folks in the U. S. A. The third plays with a pet monkey, imported from Venezuela. Cactus affords excellent camouflage and serves as a windbreak for the tents pitched near gun positions on the dusty, wind-whipped island.

canyons between giant skyscrapers, and that there is a White House in Washington to which this later governor has been promoted!

### Governor Stuyvesant Would Recognize Landmarks in Curaçao

Old Peter, however, would still recognize much of Curaçao.

He might even locate the place where his leg was buried! Sustaining an injury in the Caribbean which necessitated its amputation, he had his leg sent back to Curaçao. The spot where it reposes is not known, though some imaginative persons will point out the supposed burial place in the local cemetery.

Looking across the narrow harbor channel that bisects the town, the beholder is little aware of the importance of Willemstad as a port. One of the most advantageously situated havens in the West Indies, it has a deep waterway, known as St. Anna Bay, which extends some distance inland and then opens

into an expansive landlocked bay, called the Schottegat. Here dozens of ocean-going steamers and big tankers can lie at anchor almost completely concealed from the town. Hidden also are the harborside refineries (Plate VIII).

A bobbing pontoon bridge spans the unusual constricted channel, linking the oldest quarter of Willemstad, the Poenda, with the newer, but not exactly youthful, Otrabanda (Other Side). Pivoted at one end, the bridge is swung out of the way by cables whenever a ship approaches (Plate VII).

That happens often, for many ships pass to and fro. Before war came to upset steamship schedules and silence statistics, some 6,000 ships, with a gross register of 27,000,000 tons, passed through this waterway annually.

Invariably, if you are on one side and want to get to the other, the bridge swings away just when you want to cross! That seems especially true if you are in an automobile,



as only pedestrians and bicyclists are carried back and forth by the motor launches that do ferry service when the bridge is open. It is a standing excuse when you are late to an appointment!

#### Old Fort Amsterdam Signals Ships

Close by the Poenda end of the bridge and guarding the seaward approach to the harbor mouth, is old Fort Amsterdam. From its stone-block parapets signals are sent to ships entering port (Plates I, VI).

The Palace of the Governor stands beside its walls, fronting a wide courtyard about which are grouped government offices, the post office, and a church—a pocket edition of an Old World town. Husky Dutch marines with wide straw hats guard the gateway (page 184).

In front of the palace, as elsewhere throughout the town, concrete-coated sandbag shelters have been erected, giving Willemstad a wartime appearance.

Stocky, green-uniformed policemen ride about town on bicycles with rifles slung on their backs and "tin hats" tied to their luggage carriers. Here and there United States military police walk street patrol. Jeeps and reconnaissance cars in American war paint brush fenders with the 3,800 station-wagon buses and other passenger vehicles.

About half of Curaçao's 65,000 people live in Willemstad; many of the others are located at Emmastad, near the refineries. By far the majority of the population is of colored ancestry. In early years Curaçao was not only a slave-trading center, but its large plantation holdings were worked by negro labor.

The Hebrew colony also is large. Its roots reach back almost to the beginning of the island settlement by the Dutch, when many Jewish people, mainly of Portuguese and Spanish extraction, migrated here.

Many of the bazaars, long famous for their variety of almost-tax-free goods, are managed by East Indians. The oil industry has added to the medley of races.

By actual count, Aruba, for instance, had 45 nationalities before the Germans were sent to an internment camp on Bonaire (pages 171, 185). Curaçao, with more than twice Aruba's population, is perhaps even more varied.

The official language is that of the mother country—Dutch. But the native tongue, which almost everyone knows, is like none that you will hear any other place in the world. Called *papiamentu*, it is a patois made up of Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and a potpourri of other words.

Rich or humble, the island homes are gaily

painted in bright blue, pink, green, yellow, and other tints. The story is told that one early governor was disturbed by the blinding tropical glare on white buildings. It hurt his eyes, so he ordered that houses should all be painted in more restful colors.

Whatever may be the truth of the tale, the present effect is decidedly polychromatic. And there is an atmosphere of Dutch trimness about the whole picture.

#### A Tropical Blackout Problem

At night now a wartime blackout imposes its problems. How can all traces of light be blocked off in a tropically built home or hotel and still allow a ventilating breeze? How to shield an almost-open-air movie from sea or sky prowlers?

The people have had to find the answers. Going to bed early is hardly a solution, for here, only some 12 degrees above the Equator, nights are nearly the same length as days.

Groping through Willemstad's dark streets of an evening, I came upon native groups sitting in doorways and along curbs talking or strumming musical instruments. Inside black maws of buildings radios and phonographs blared. Cars find their way about with only tiny open slits on their headlights.

One evening as I sat on the balcony of my darkened hotel I saw a group of young native athletes file past. The last one in the procession was wearing a dim taillight. As they turned to cross the pontoon bridge, the light was obediently switched off until the party reached the opposite side!

If Willemstad's architecture is reminiscent of the Netherlands, the rest of the island is not. Thirty-eight miles long and eight miles across at its widest place, Curaçao is largely a thirsty coral and lime rockland. Tall cactus, prickly "Spanish ladies," and divi-divi trees form its main growth (page 189).

The trade wind blowing perpetually from the northeast over the islands has whipped and tugged at these divi-divi trees until their branches stretch out to one side like fantastic long pennants. Aviators don't need to look for windsocks or the drift of smoke here; they need only see which way the trees are blown!

Were it not for this constant trade wind the islands would be a much hotter and a less pleasant place to live. Even the fumes of the oil refineries are quickly dissipated in such a strong breeze.

Unfortunately, water is scarce. Rainfall averages only about 20 inches a year—if it comes. At the time of my visit the islands were suffering from a four years' drought. Though it was harvest time, there

## Curaçao and Aruba, Oil Isles of the Caribbean



**Flying the Dutch Flag, Schooners Bring Fruit and Vegetables from Venezuela to Aruba**  
Sailing vessels are the chief trade link in the Netherlands-owned islands, carrying food, salt, cattle, and fish.



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### **Dutch Marines Man a Defense Gun Atop the Walls of Old Fort Amsterdam**

This historic battlement guards the narrow harbor entrance at Willemstad, Curaçao (Plate VI). Invited by the Netherlands Government, U. S. troops are stationed on Curaçao and Aruba to protect the refineries. American and local forces are under U. S. Navy command.





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### With No Oil of Its Own, Aruba Has the World's Largest Refinery and Cracking Plant

Crude petroleum is brought by shallow-draft lake tankers from the Maracabo wells in near-by Venezuela. After refining, oils and gasoline are shipped abroad in large ocean tankers. In February, 1942, German submarines attacked here, but succeeded only in setting fire to a few ships.





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**Like a Western Boom Town, St. Nicolaas Has Mushroomed about the Lago Refinery**

Among the workers are 44 nationalities. Near by is a trim settlement where American employees live. Another refinery is located at Oranjestad, near the opposite end of the island. Much of Britain's high-octane gasoline and fuel for her fleet comes from Aruba and Curaçao.





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West Point (Westpunt) on Curaçao Is Only a Small Village on the Bluff and a Beach Off Which Fishermen String Their Nets

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# Gaily the Younger Set at the Curaçao Sports Club Steps to the Rhythm of the Conga

These folk devised this form of the conga as a theatrical entertainment and created their own costumes. Social life centers about the many sports clubs.





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# Steaming Past Historic Fort Amsterdam, a Dutch Naval Craft Enters Willemstad's Bottleneck Harbor

Motorcars must pause while the pontoon bridge (opposite page) is drawn aside to let the ship pass. Across the narrow neck of St. Anna Bay appears a portion of the Governor General's Palace (left). Station wagons are often used in Curaçao as buses.





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With Its Brightly Painted Gabled Buildings, Willemstad Suggests a Bit of the Netherlands Anchored in the Caribbean

The pontoon bridge, connecting the two portions of the town, is swinging to the left to let a ship enter the harbor. Small launches ferry people across when the bridge is open. Peter Stuyvesant governed Curaçao before he was also given control of New Amsterdam, now New York.





**The Refinery at Curaçao Bristles with Stacks, Towers, and Oil Tanks**

A large portion of the island's 65,000 population gains its living in one way or another from this huge enterprise of the C. P. I. M. (Curaçaosche Petroleum Industrie Maatschappij), a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Shell Company.



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**Row on Row of Storage Tanks Surrounds the Huge Refinery at Curaçao**

These sprawling installations rank third in cracking capacity and are surpassed only by the Lago refinery at Aruba and one at Abadan, Iran. Located beside landlocked Schottegat harbor, it has drydocks for its tanker fleet.



was hardly a stalk of corn anywhere on the island.

Windmills, not the picturesque Dutch kind but those familiar to the Midwest of the United States, whirl in the wind to pump water from underground wells. Much of it, however, is so brackish that both Curaçao and Aruba use distilling plants for purifying sea water (page 188).

Gardens grow only in the sheltered areas between the hills and thrive mainly because Chinese gardeners painstakingly irrigate them. Much of the food and fruit consumed on the islands is brought by sailboat from Venezuela (Plate I).

Here and there orange trees grow, yielding the peculiar green peel used to flavor Curaçao liqueur. Most of this widely known liqueur was not made in the islands, but the dried peels were sent to Amsterdam or Hamburg for its manufacture.

#### The Pattern of Island Bays

One of the most striking geographical features of the island is the form of its indented bays. The Schottegat, about which most of the shipping is concentrated, is the biggest of these. There are a half dozen others notching the coast that follow the same pattern. From narrow, constricted entrances they spread out into large land-protected reaches of water (page 186).

A dozen or so sizable hills corrugate the landscape of Curaçao. St. Christoffelberg at the northwestern end of the island is the largest. It rises to a height of 1,220 feet. A lower one, Tafelberg, or Table Hill, at the opposite end near deeply indented Caracas and Fuik Bays, is a source of calcium phosphate.

Workers are hewing and blasting away the hillside and then trundling carloads down to the water front, where it is ground and then dumped into dusty freighters for shipment abroad as fertilizer.

At one time similar deposits were exploited on Klein Curaçao (Little Curaçao)—a tiny near-by island that now has a population of only three people—and on Aruba. Both of these have been exhausted.

Aside from this single mining operation, almost the sole industry on the island before the oil boom came was the making of native straw hats. Back in 1910 fully a fifth of the population was engaged in this home occupation.

The leaves from the palmetto (*Carludovica palmata*) used in the weaving were brought from Maracaibo. Some hat weaving still goes on, but the amount it pays cannot compete

with wages that can be earned at the refinery.

Long ago large haciendas, utilizing slave labor, tried growing sugar and tobacco. But the effort never had much success because of the lack of rainfall.

Some of the big houses of the old estates are scattered over the island, but many are unused and are falling into disrepair. They are so large that not even an oil baron could afford to keep them in order.

The magic of oil brought by the Curaçoesche Petroleum Industrie Maatschappij (let us call it C. P. I. M.; everyone does!), a branch of the Royal Dutch Shell, has radically altered the island (Plate VIII).

Lean years are no more. Since the establishment of the refinery during the last war, the population has more than doubled. Labor has migrated here from Surinam and from the West Indies islands.

Trade that Curaçao once garnered as middleman and distribution agent at the crossroads of the Caribbean also increased until war upset normal shipping.

#### "Cactus Pete's" Victory Garden

Many of the people have almost forgotten that much of the island is only a cactus patch. Not so the American soldiers.

At one post that I visited, "Cactus Pete," as the men call him, has laid out a small V-for-Victory garden, all in cactus! Collecting cacti is also the hobby of the American Vice Consul in Willemstad. He has 33 different varieties around his house.

"How do you like it here?" I asked another group of soldiers whose tents were crowded into clumps of cactus so thick that I wondered how they ever got to the guy ropes. "Fine," answered one. "It's just like Texas; I feel right at home."

"Isn't this luxury!" shouted one of two others urging pint-sized donkeys up the hill. "No more walking for us on the rocks."

By some fancy bargaining they had just bought their floppy-eared mounts for practically nothing. One pink-cheeked lad, with sunburned peeling nose, elsewhere had bought a pair of slippers for 75 cents and had a donkey thrown in—if he could catch it!

If the donkey had belonged to anyone in particular, the native salesman was not worried. The beast probably would soon get away and wander home. Both donkeys and goats seem to thrive on the islands and roam at random in the roads and fields (page 185).

In off-duty moments the troops play basketball, tennis, and other sports at local recreation clubs or indulge in sand-lot baseball. Cold "cokes" and beer at the canteens flush



### "I Haven't Seen My Family for Three Years"

That was the comment of this brawny Dutch marine on guard in Aruba. They were in the Netherlands when it was blasted and overrun by Nazi hordes in the summer of 1940. Javanese and West Indies natives also serve with Dutch troops, manning coastal batteries and guarding oil refineries.

much coral dust out of their throats. Of course, as everywhere, they have their pets—mainly monkeys from Venezuela (page 173).

The contingent also has its daily newspaper, a single mimeographed sheet, known as *Force*. It specializes on news bulletins, poems, and the escapades of one Señor Rumorrr.

The boys use an ice pick to cut the stencil for their daily cartoon.

But the men also work hard, and mean business. An officer and I walked up to an outlook post one day, only to be confronted by a very business-looking bayonet. Though the guard knew the officer, he had received no order to let us pass. We didn't, until his sergeant came to our aid.

With feelings intensified by seeing the Netherlands and the East Indies crushed by conquest, the Dutch marines, naval men, and other local forces (including some Javanese) likewise stand staunchly on guard.

Most of them have relatives in one broken land or the other; it's *not* going to happen here if they can prevent it.

"I'll do all I can to hurry this job along so that I can get back to my wife and children in the Netherlands. I haven't seen them for three years now," said one powerful marine who stood a full head higher than my mere six feet.

The Dutch as well as all the American forces on both islands are united under the unified command of the United States Navy.

With the fall of the Netherlands the main company offices of the large Dutch mercantile fleet withdrew to the Netherlands Indies; thence in turn it was forced to shift here to Curaçao. The K. L. M. air line likewise has had to bring its headquar-

ters to the islands. Some of the pilots who flew in the European service or out to the Far East now man the planes on expanding routes throughout this area.

Among the fleet of trim Lockheeds is one old veteran Fokker which first flew the mid-Atlantic from Amsterdam to Curaçao in 1934! Though a bit slow, it is still going strong and is in daily local service.

Several planes a day hop the 75-air-mile span to and from Aruba, and some of the flights continue on to Maracaibo. Others shuttle back and forth to La Guaira, or follow the north coast to Trinidad and down to Surinam. A frequent service has also been developed with Jamaica, where Dutch families



can gain a holiday in the hills away from Curaçao's heat.

### On Sequestered Bonaire

Thirty miles east of Curaçao is Bonaire, the quiet, retiring member of these sister Dutch islands.

Two planes a week fly over with mail and passengers. In normal times a steamship plying to and from the Leeward Islands also pays it a call; otherwise, it is left pretty much to itself.

The term "quaint" that is sometimes applied to Curaçao could better be applied to Bonaire.

Big-billed pelicans are the reception committee at its pier. Its wide salt pans are dotted with thousands of pink flamingos. Iguanas and giant lizards scurry through the bushes on its coral rocks.

Yes, people live here—more than 5,000 in all. But life is simple. There are few time clocks to punch, few distractions. Here are no refineries to work in or to guard. The local forces have only to guard the Germans held in an internment camp. The nearest that its people get to commerce is the collection of salt in big salt pans and the draining of medicinal gum from quantities of aloe plants.

Kralendijk (Coral Dike), the capital where the Lieutenant Governor lives, is a peaceful village with a delightful Dutch flavor. The rest of the island is a slightly less than half-sized model of Curaçao, having an area of only 95 square miles against the other's 210.

Aruba is still smaller. It has an area of only 69 square miles. Yet in the oil picture it looms large (Plate II).

The Lago Oil and Transport Company operates the world's biggest refinery here. In its



### "No More Hiking on the Coral Rock for Us!"

So boasted two U. S. soldiers to their buddies when they returned to camp. They bought these floppy-eared donkeys from the natives for almost nothing (page 183). A short time later the author saw one of the men afoot, trying to push his "mount" up a hill.

cracking capacity, especially, it outranks all others. Stills, cracking plants, hydrogenation units, and a maze of storage tanks crowd this concession, which is operated by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.

### "Make Hitler Boil in Lago Oil"

Today, the oil people don't talk much about what they are doing. One large sign near the gateway of the refinery is brief but to the point. It reads: "Make Hitler Boil in Lago Oil!"

To get into the refinery isn't easy now. Armed with one pass and riding in an Army jeep, we made a long, circuitous drive to get to see the manager in the air-conditioned





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### Sprawling, Multiarmed Schottegat Provides Curacao with a Magnificent Landlocked Harbor

Oil tankers and freighters cluster about the wharves of the big C.P.I.M. refineries. Curacao has several of these land-girt reaches of water, connected with the sea by bottlenecks. In the far distance, right, is Tafelberg (Table Hill), on whose side can be seen a white gash where phosphate is mined (page 183).





Philip Hanson Hiss

### Formal Ceremonies Attend the Opening of the "States," or Legislative Assembly, by the Governor at Willemstad

Wearing full dress with cocked hat, he leaves after the opening. The assembly is made up of 15 members, 10 elected and five appointed by the crown. Politically the "territory" of Curaçao consists not only of Curaçao and its adjacent islands, but also of Saba, St. Eustatius, and the Netherlands portion of St. Martin. In December, 1942, Queen Wilhelmina announced plans for postwar autonomy of overseas territories, giving them a voice in their home governments.





**On Thirsty Curaçao and Tiny Aruba, Water Is a Precious Commodity**

Rainfall is scarce, averaging about 15 inches annually for Aruba, and 20 inches for Curaçao. Water in many of these wells is brackish from salt-water seepage. Both islands have distillation plants for purifying sea water. Camouflaged tents of U. S. guard troops perch on the hill beyond.





Constant Northeast Winds Cause Divi-divi Trees to Grow Lopsided on the Curacao and Aruba Landscape  
On this arid soil of Aruba are seen low-growing aloes, whence comes much of the world's supply of aloin, used in medical preparations (page 191).



U. S. Troops Maneuver in Bren Gun Carriers and Trucks Left by the British at Curacao





#### American Sailors Salute the Netherlands Flag as Their Warship Enters Port

Whenever an American craft sails in past Fort Amsterdam at Willemstad, Curaçao, this formality is observed. The Netherlands flag at the fort is dipped in reply. All military and naval forces, both United States and local, on Curaçao and Aruba are under the command of the U. S. Navy. Both Dutch and American vessels share in the patrol of the waters about the islands. A heavy traffic of ships, many of them tankers carrying oil to and from the refinery, passes through this deep channel, known as St. Anna Bay (Plate VI). In the background are sailboats which bring fruit and fresh vegetables from near-by Venezuela.



administrative offices. With another pass we were permitted to enter one of the main gates to see the chief guard, who was a six-foot-three Texan wearing a big badge and a six-shooter.

While we sat talking with him, as still another pass was being made out, the manager called to secure a permit for himself. He had just tried to get into one of the buildings and had been stopped at the door!

Outside the refinery area, but still within the concession, you are more welcome. In fact, hospitality is unbounded. Here is a little America where some 2,500 people live in trim company houses.

At homes or at the club you talk Texas, New Orleans, Oklahoma, and other places back home. You learn also that an Aruba chicken *can* be made to taste like chicken "Southern style"!

Flowers flaunt themselves bravely from handfuls of carefully watered earth that have been laid over the coral and lava rock. The company encourages gardening by providing soil and fertilizer. "Essoville" is almost home town, but not quite.

Close to the refinery compound is the village of St. Nicolaas, a tiny international cross section embracing 44 nationalities. Cactus and barren old lava flows encompass the near-by countryside (Plate III).

Oranjestad, the capital, lies a few miles away near the opposite end of the island. Just a short distance beyond its brightly tinted buildings, smoking chimneys smudge the cloudless blue sky.

Here are more stills, tanks, and other refinery installations. They belong to the Arend, or Eagle Company, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell. Smaller than the Lago plant, this refinery is also older. Both, however, were constructed in the late 1920's.

### Aruba Even More Barren Than Curaçao

Most of Aruba is even more barren than is Curaçao. Much of the vegetation that exists on the island is largely confined to the western portion where some of the wind-blown soil has found lodging. The rest is almost stripped bare.

Along the northern, or windward, side waves crash against rugged lime and lava bluffs, gouging out fantastic caves and creating overhanging ledges.

A lagoon fringes the southern side of the island, and coconut groves cover part of the western portion to lend a tropical appearance. Palm Beach, a lovely arc of golden sand, stretches beyond this band of coconut trees.

As on Curaçao, wind-blown divi-divi trees also hang lopsided on the landscape. In some places the pods of this tree (*Caesalpinia coriaria*) are collected commercially and shipped abroad for tanning purposes (page 189).

Over on the northern side of the island I came upon curiously eroded rocks which had been scooped out on one side so that they, like the trees, seemed all to be blown in one direction.

### Source of Aloes and Aloin

At some of the roadside fields I stopped to watch natives cutting aloes, an industry that thrived long before the oil trade began. The men cut the thick fleshy leaves and place them in inclined troughs to drain.

The thick lemon-yellow juice that exudes from the leaves is collected in receptacles and is later taken away to be boiled down to a pitch-black gum. In this form it is shipped to world markets.

This gum contains aloin, which forms the medicinal ingredient of many cathartics. Some 60 percent of the world's supply of aloes comes from this tiny island.

According to some authorities, the variety of aloes harvested here was originally brought from the island of Socotra by Dutch West Indies colonists. The plants thrive almost without attention; the sun, thin soil, and limited rainfall are ideal for their growth.

More than a century ago gold was discovered on Aruba. Alluvial ore that had been washed into the sand beds of watercourses in the western part of the island was first exploited.

Later, primary gold deposits were located. Most of it was embedded in quartz, though in some cases it appeared in thin veins or more rarely in small nuggets.

From time to time companies were formed for extracting and smelting gold, but apparently without great success. While roaming about the island we came upon several old mine and smelter ruins. The gold had either run out or its recovery became so expensive that the work was abandoned.

Never a place for much agricultural enterprise, Aruba now has few fields.

Cultivation almost ended when the people found employment in the refineries and could get imported products. Amid a chaos of granite boulders that strew the island are some patches of green vegetation, but much of the sun-blistered landscape appears like something conceived by Dante.

Crisscross Aruba on any of its lanes and you won't find a single wooden house or tin





Philip Hanson Hiss

### Dressed in Their Formal Best, a Bonaire Couple Is Wed

Like most natives here, they have probably saved for years to have fine clothes for their wedding. They stand before the Lieutenant Governor of the island as he performs the civil ceremony. A church service will follow. Most natives in these Netherlands islands are Roman Catholic.

shack occupied by the natives. All are of stone or durable plaster. All appear freshly painted or whitewashed. Few places elsewhere in the West Indies are in such enviable circumstance.

Native islanders here still show strong traces of their Arawak ancestry. Skins are brown and facial characteristics contrast strongly with the negro element of Curaçao. But as more workers have come to the refineries, this racial strain is in the minority.

### More Vital Than Ever Before

Yes, an unusual group of islands are these fragments of the Netherlands here in the Caribbean.

Today they are important as never before. Not only are their oil installations vital to war, but as bases they serve as an inner defense guard to the Panama Canal, only about 700 miles away.

In Curaçao I talked again with the officer in charge of their protection.

"Now that you have seen my whole command, what do you think of it?" he asked.

I had been with the United States troops on field problems, had seen posts manned by forces whose fingers itched for action, and had watched patrols on active duty.

But perhaps I thought most about the determined expression on the face of the giant, good-natured Netherlands marine who wanted to see his family in the home country soon (page 184).

My answer was to the effect that I thought Curaçao and Aruba were fully on guard.

The Axis submarine that had returned to fire a few shells at outlying oil tanks apparently thought so, too. I knew the battery that forced it suddenly to crash-dive to escape.





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